

Chapter 51

E-Government, E-Surveillance, and Ethical Issues from Malaysian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

E-government is a flagship application of the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor project, with the aim to reinvent government and bring about changes to the society in order to push forward into the information era. In this context, government services are believed to be more efficient and effective. Furthermore, improved service levels should be the focus of this reinvention. At the same time, surveillance is used in homes, offices and public areas (i.e. the government over its citizens). E-surveillance with invisible, visible, semi-concealed cameras and sensors is embedded everywhere in all corners of society. This situation has destroyed people's privacy even though the main purpose of having electronic surveillance is for security and safety purposes. This chapter discusses e-government and surveillance adaptation, and the ethical issues such as privacy and confidentiality, and personal data protection. Then it proposes a conceptual framework for understanding 'e-government-e-surveillance-ethical issues', and last with the conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

E-government focuses on the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve the management of the government through offering more flexible and convenient services to the citizens and enhancing the public participation. The utilization of ICT in the public sector is increasingly being adopted in Malaysia. According to the Global Information Technology Report 2010-2011, Malaysia is ranked 10th for ICT readiness of the society as a whole (Dutta & Mia, 2011). ICT plays a critical role in its Vision 2020 plan for Malaysia to become a high-income economy by 2020. The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) was established in 1996 with the aspiration of becoming a global hub for ICT and

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multimedia innovation, operation and services and to transform Malaysia into a knowledge-economy and achieve developed nation status in line with Vision 2020 (Ch Deka, Mohamad Zain & Mahanti, 2012).

The Malaysian government has envisioned a technologically advanced society and government through Vision 2020, which launched in 1992. As stated above, in 1996, the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) was launched in which the government has introduced e-government projects such as Electronic Services (E-Services), Human Resource Management Information System, E-Syariah, and Project Monitoring System (PMS) in order to transform the government from paper-based and integrated agencies and departments to an integrated and networked government. The significant achievement of e-government was the implementation of the Public Service Portal known as 'myGovernment', which provided a one-stop window to information and services of public sector agencies over the Internet (Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010). Further, the electronic services (e-services) project for the on-line delivery of government services included the renewal of driving licenses and the payment of bills online.

Information and communication technology (ICT) security measures were instituted as an integral component of good ICT governance. These included standards, incident reporting and monitoring mechanisms to protect government ICT assets and information. The 'Pemantauan Rangkaian ICT Sektor Awam Malaysia' (PRISMA), the government security command centre was established in 2002 to address ICT security threats. Today, surveillance is becoming a normal instrument or tool of government because of the use of surveillance in homes, offices and public areas; in other words, surveillance with invisible, visible, semi-concealed cameras and sensors embedded in almost all sides of society. Government surveillance is done through monitoring citizens or users' activity, communication and accessing citizens or users' data. In this regard, data are accessed from the electronic services portals. Electronic government surveillance has become a tool used to spy on corporations and individuals, including domestic citizens, often with little restraint from domestic laws and even less regard for international ones. In the process, legitimate companies trying to provide innovative ICT products and services to their customers are facing demands from governments around the world to pervert their offerings for the sake of intelligence gathering.

As of 2012, Malaysia had more than 17 million internet users with a national penetration rate of 60.7 percent (ITU, 2012). Also, in 2012, Malaysia ranked in 59th place on the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) ICT Development Index, and the country has registered marked growth with improved access to computers and the Internet among its citizens (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2014). As government agencies use ICT to collect, store and make accessible data on individuals, privacy concerns have grown. The result has been growing unease from users, consumers and businesses that are afraid they can no longer trust certain companies subject to potential government mandates to disclose data. Government has been known to somewhat abuse citizens', consumers' and businesses' data and information. For example, the Malaysian government had launched a multipurpose smart identification for its citizen, in September 2001 named "MyKad". It incorporates multiple applications with several sets of personal information about the card holder. The amount of personal information stored on the Mykad raises concerns about the information privacy of Malaysians because both authorized and unauthorized access to personal information can result in its misuse.

The chapter is organized as follows: The first section discusses the concept of e-government surveillance. The second section clarifies the e-government surveillance in Malaysia. In the third section, the ethical issues related to e-government surveillance is presented and discussed within the context of Malaysia. Then, a conceptual framework for e-government surveillance and its ethical issues will be proposed, and a conclusion will be drawn in the last section.

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